

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 113

Introduced by Assembly Member Caballero

January 27, 2010

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 113—Relative to the Bracero Memorial Highway.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 113, as introduced, Caballero. Bracero Memorial Highway.

This measure would designate a specified portion of State Highway Route 101 between Soledad and Chualar, in Monterey County, as the Bracero Memorial Highway. This measure would also request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering those costs, to erect those signs in specified locations.

Fiscal committee: yes.

- 1 WHEREAS, Mexican nationals, known as Braceros, were legally
2 contracted to work mostly in the agricultural and railroad industries
3 in the Salinas Valley, and elsewhere, to alleviate a labor shortage
4 during World War II; and
5 WHEREAS, Two tragic, preventable incidents illustrate their
6 unsafe working conditions; and
7 WHEREAS, On June 17, 1958, approximately 50 Mexican
8 Braceros were being transported from a Soledad labor camp to
9 perform field work in the Salinas Valley. The truck transporting
10 them was a flat bed truck converted to have a covered metal top,

1 wooden benches, and only narrow exits at the end of the vehicle;
2 and

3 WHEREAS, Purportedly, two gasoline cans were in the truck
4 for two days prior to the incident, which the driver claimed were
5 emptied the day before the accident. The driver did not inform the
6 passengers that they should not smoke because there were gasoline
7 cans in the truck; and

8 WHEREAS, One of the men lit a match igniting a flash fire in
9 the passenger compartment of the vehicle; and

10 WHEREAS, Twelve men died immediately of asphyxia and
11 second, third, and fourth-degree burns as they were trapped in the
12 vehicle, two more men later died, and an additional 17 Mexican
13 Braceros were hospitalized; and

14 WHEREAS, At that time, there was no state law prohibiting
15 carrying gasoline cans in vehicles, and no criminal charges were
16 brought; and

17 WHEREAS, The National Safety Council considered the fire
18 the worst noncollision vehicle tragedy in the nation since 1944;
19 and

20 WHEREAS, On September 17, 1963, on a lonely stretch of
21 railroad track paralleling State Highway Route 101 at Thomas
22 Ranch Road in the City of Chualar, near Salinas, California, 32
23 Bracero farmworkers lost their lives and another 24 were injured
24 in the biggest single fatal vehicle accident in California history
25 and the worst of its type in United States' history; and

26 WHEREAS, The Braceros who were injured and killed were
27 being transported in a truck converted into a bus without the
28 approval of, or inspection by, any government agency, on the way
29 to harvest celery for one dollar (\$1) per hour, when struck by an
30 oncoming train; and

31 WHEREAS, Legal immigrant farmworkers continue to cross
32 the border to work in many parts of California without being
33 provided safe working conditions or being treated with dignity
34 and respect; and

35 WHEREAS, In recognition of the Braceros' contributions and
36 sacrifice in the Salinas Valley and elsewhere in California, it would
37 be a fitting tribute to designate a portion of State Highway Route
38 101, between Soledad and Chualar, in Monterey County, as the
39 Bracero Memorial Highway; now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
2 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature hereby designates the 15
3 mile portion of State Highway Route 101 from exit 302, south of
4 Soledad, to exit 317, south of Chualar, in Monterey County as the
5 Bracero Memorial Highway; and be it further

6 *Resolved*, That the Department of Transportation is requested
7 to determine the cost of appropriate signs consistent with the
8 signing requirements for the state highway system showing this
9 special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate
10 sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs within 100
11 feet from exit 302, south of Soledad, on the northbound lane and
12 200 feet south of Chualar after exit 317 in the southbound lane;
13 and be it further

14 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
15 of this resolution to the Department of Transportation and to the
16 author for appropriate distribution.